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Ojibwe's Resilience in Upholding Their Indigenous Language: Karen Louise Erdrich's *Antelope Woman*

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Abstract

Native American education has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges Ojibwe's facing the world today. It has historically been employed against American Indians as a colonial weapon. One way to characterize the American Indian Boarding School system is as a covert conflict, a conflict to achieve total cultural dominance. In order to reduce tribal populations and eradicate tribal cultures, it is employed as a weapon to separate and isolate youngsters from their families. This paper "Ojibwe's Persistence in preserving Native Language: Karen Louise Erdrich's *Antelope Woman*" emphasizes how American Indians continue to face educational inequalities due to the mainstream White population's disregard for their culture. It highlights the fact that a large number of Indian American families in America rely on public education as a means of achieving more possibilities and upward mobility. By introducing tribal values into mainstream schools, it offers hope that not only help American Indian children make educational connections, but it can also improve the learning environment for all students.

Keywords: Tribal rights, Ojibwe, Colonial policy, Tribal Politics, Native Language.

The 1972 Indian Control of Indian Education legislation gave Native Americans the right to an education, which has now developed into an empowering and thoughtful idea. It confirms that it is still the duty of Native people to provide Native children with an education rooted in their culture. It inspired to confront the whites and had the courage to define their education in terms of their own voices. Barman quotes their native education as:

They defined education based on life principles embedded in our worldview while balancing theories of dominant western models. They expect that education should strengthen Native languages and cultures, moving away from acculturation and assimilation as final ends to revitalizing and renewing cultural identity and dignity. (3)

Disparities in schooling still exist in American native communities. With their legal and political rights as well as their sovereign status, the indigenous people in America who are officially recognized as Tribes are unique and numerous. This is evident by statement of the Bureau of Indian Affairs as:

Tribal legal and political right are rooted in the inherent sovereign status that each tribe has, and is affirmed by the U.S constitution and in U.S Supreme Court rulings as noted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, when the governmental authority of Tribes was first challenged in the 1830's, U.S Supreme court Chief Justice John Marshall articulated the fundamental principle that has guided the evolution of Federal Indian Law the present: That tribes possess a nationhood status and retain inherent powers of self-government. (*Social Sciences* 3)

Through Louise Erdrich's *Antelope Woman*, the researcher has shed light on this problem among the Ojibwe, an Indigenous group that inhabited the North Dakota Reservation. The American school system's disparities have led to the worst educational achievement among the Ojibwe people. They are unable to speak up against their own societal issues because of

their lack of education. Native American culture and physicality were destroyed as a result of the American school system's extended adoption of settler colonial reasoning. One could characterize it as a covert conflict, a struggle for total cultural dominance. In order to reduce tribal populations and eradicate tribal cultures, it is employed as a weapon to take and separate children from their families. With adaption, they are compelled to be removed from their own homelands. Children are taken away from their family in an early age. They worked on White's farms and resided in their house as servants. Maintaining ties with family is challenging for them because transportation to boarding institutions is more expensive. For instance, in one of the American Sociology Studies published in an American Sociological Association journal, Evelyn Nakano Glenn argues as:

One logic of settler colonial policy has been the ultimate erasure of Native American. This goal was pursued through various forms of genocide, ranging from military violence to biological and cultural assimilation via the belief that the savage, heathen, uncivilized indigenous were not making productive use of the land or its resources. (67)

The Ojibwe were denied access to education because of the whites' cruel tactics. They lose their cultural teachings, their roots, and their ties to their own Indigenous homelands as a result of it, they failed to resolve their socioeconomic issue. The goal of the Whites is to subjugate the homelands of Native Americans and employs education as a means of eradicating them. The idea of cultural blindness masks the entrenched social inequalities inter-twined in their education system. Patricia Hill Collins, in her work argues as:

What the United States needs is another kind of public education-one that encourages us to become an involved, informed public what this country needs is a recommitment to schools and other social institutions whose mandate lies in delivering the kind of public education that will equip us for this task. (9)

By providing them with in-depth knowledge of their own native land, its resources, and its culture, their education can advance to a larger degree. They may undergo a number of societal changes as a result of their desire to preserve their culture and homeland. With the settler colonial rationale, the Whites intended to eradicate the tribal language by forcible removal, demonstrating that changes might be violent if there is still a strong concern for the survival of Indigenous languages. The Elders, who are fluent speakers of the local language, have warned them of the hazards of the loss of native language at this point, which is obvious in *Antelope Woman*.

My message to the Ojibwe people is that learning to read and write your own language is very important. It is the only way to save your native language and culture for the future generation. We are losing our elders everyday as they depart to a better place...encourage the younger generation to pursue an education, learn the language, teach their children to speak, read and write, and do their part to help preserve the native language and culture of the Ojibwe people. (51)

Regarding the Ojibwe people's education and their ties to their ancestral homelands and ancestors, the White people have a fearful insight. The Whites want them to be scattered and genuinely ill in order to subjugate them. In order to obtain their resources, the White people want the Ojibwe to receive their education inside their own educational system and enact new laws for them. This started the English-dominance in Native education. Though the Ojibwe's struggle to resist the Linguistic genocide of Tribal languages but there is an intentional eradication of Indigenous languages by the Whites and to disempower the Indigenous community. E. Koochan Paik argues the linguistic genocide of tribal language as:

A routine tactic in successful colonization is to colonize the minds of the people by killing the native language. Within language is an entire universe containing history,

culture, pride, identity, and well-being. To replace and indigenous language with a colonial tongue immediately puts the native at a disadvantage. As the colonized mind realigns to the worldview and universe embodied in the new language, it begins to rationalize the world through colonial eyes. Soon, the colonized people see all things native as inferior, including themselves, so they acquire to assimilation and exploitation. Once the mental landscape has been conquered, the rest is easy. (142)

The profound sense of estrangement and frustration is accepted by Ojibwe society. From their point of view, the torments of white people continuously harm their spirits, and they are powerless to discover a different strategy for advancing in life. Despite their increased attempts to teach the Ojibwe that the harsh acts of White people have brought them down.

Erdrich's portrayal of Antelope Woman demonstrates the American educational system's influence on Ojibwe people. By suppressing the growth of native education, the Ojibwe's voice is silenced and they are compelled to receive their education under White rule. The quote from *Antelope Woman* explains the framework of the American education by elucidating Erdrich's character Augustus, the son of a White man in *Antelope Woman*. "At home, he read with his father, and both agreed with Pythagoras that the essence of things was to be found in numbers. At school, Augustus's best subject was math. The family spoke English with him..." (27). Here, Ojibwe children are taught in the White woman's manner. On the other hand, White children receive superior schooling from an early age. Even at home, they are forced to read, write, and complete assignments that require text analysis. As a result, they succeed in their own traditions and culture. The Ojibwe people have lost this chance.

Native elders play a crucial role in highlighting the value of education and its advancement. *Antelope Woman's* Shawano serves as a clear example of it. He imparts knowledge of their customs, culture, and habits to a kid named Augustus. His teaching is quoted

in *Antelope Woman* as, “Old Shawano taught Augustus how to pick wild rice, weave nets, tap maples, and how to dream the whereabouts of animals and to follow their tracks and use wind to catch them. He learned from Shawano an old – time Indian’s habits” (37).

The educational priorities of Indigenous elders and those of the United States school system might be compared. The concentration on electronic devices in the American educational system throws off the balance of their methodologies. The success on a standardized test defines an ideology of individual achievement. Students can participate in the Indigenous storytelling tradition as part of their curriculum. Students engage in cultural learning and teaching through the practice of storytelling, and they strengthen their bonds with one another through shared experiences. Indigenous elders should be given priority in order to teach the next generation more about their ancestors, homelands, and culture. Introducing native education is the most efficient means of elevating Ojibwe voices, making personalized and social change. The natives will be inspired to oppose the whites. Lastly, educational institutions can be created by Indigenous groups to support and aid them in preserving their languages, customs, and ancestral lands.

Native Americans need to establish their own space in the post-colonial world. This research paper exposes readers how tough it is for Native Americans to establish their own educational principles in the face of the Western world's constant encroachment. Presenting the historical with modern tribal life, it looks at the different ways Erdrich writes about rebuilding tribal literature. As a result, educational institutions that assist Native Americans in preserving their culture, traditions, families, and communities can undergo changes.

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